

investment has got to be part of the solution.

If you are a lucky enough individual to break even, and that is even if Congress does not face up to the problem, then I think it is very important that Congress wakes up to the fact that the longer we delay a solution for Social Security, the more drastic that solution is going to have to be.

So what my proposal says is let us start private investment, where part of that Social Security tax can go into a personal retirement investment fund that is the property of the worker, and if they are lucky enough to meet the average of the last 80 years it will increase at the rate of 8.5 percent per year, and through the magic of compound interest it will result in greater benefits and save Social Security.

SUPPORT PUBLIC EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentlewoman from Michigan [Ms. STABENOW] is recognized during morning hour debates for 4 minutes.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about one of the most critical issues facing our country, and that is support for public education and developing and expanding a skilled work force that is able to compete in the world in the 21st Century.

We are going to be discussing this week on this floor issues related to public education. We are going to be talking about the D.C. schools and the fact that there are leaky roofs, roofs falling in, and what the solution should be.

We are going to hear from the majority that the solution to leaky roofs is vouchers. We on the minority side are going to say that the solution to leaky roofs is to fix the roof, it is to then go on and make sure we have quality teachers teaching basic skills with technology in their classrooms, safe classrooms, children coming into kindergarten prepared to learn, and that we make a national commitment to our public education system all across this country.

Our democracy is founded on the belief that we have to provide a quality public education to every child in every neighborhood if we are to remain strong and independent as a country.

There are wonderful examples of supporting public schools in my district in Michigan. I attended on Sunday a celebration of a restoration of the Mason public schools, where in their elementary schools and their high school they have been investing in increasing their science labs and putting more technology into the buildings, a new field house, renovating their auditorium for the arts.

That community has made a strong public commitment and said to the young people of that community, "We believe in you, we will invest in you, and we want your public schools to be the best they can be."

All across my district now we are involved in a private sector effort called Net Day, where the business community has come together investing dollars, the labor community, through the leadership of IBEW and our electricians, are donating their personal time on Saturdays to come into the schools, working with our educators, working with every part of the community to wire our schools for the textbook of the future called the Internet, whether it is the Lansing public schools where we are wiring, in fact have wired 29 schools and are now moving on to bring volunteers to work with young people on basic reading skills, whether it is Pinckney elementary school that was wired, Lake Fenton a week ago, or the Fenton public schools on November 1.

We have a strong commitment in Michigan to bringing together all parts of the community to make the public school system the best that it can be. Do we need variety? Yes. Do we need choices? Of course. But if we pull dollars away from our public school system to put into private schools and thereby undermine the ability of every child to get a quality education, we do not do well for the future of this country.

There is a fundamental debate going on in this Chamber, a fundamental debate that each of us will be participating in through our votes. I strongly encourage my colleagues to step up and support a continuing strong public school system for the future.

Our children are moving into a world that is very different, that involves competing with people all over the world. They need skills that will allow them to be prepared to be successful in that world. It starts with a strong public school system.

LOW-INCOME CHILDREN DESERVE BEST SHOT AT GOOD EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Texas, [Mr. SAM JOHNSON], is recognized during morning hour debates for 4 minutes.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I agree, we got to keep the public schools going, but why does the President continue to deny low income students a chance to excel academically? Why does he insist that children attend unsafe and often drug-infested schools?

Well, to be honest, I am still trying to find the answer to these questions. I find it ironic that both the President and Vice President send their children not to the District's struggling public schools, but to safe and challenging private schools. They understand and they want their children to get the best education, get it in a safe and friendly environment. They do not want their children to walk through metal detectors and have police roaming the walks and the halls or witness

a drug buy or a shooting, and I do not blame them.

But I believe that every child, black, white, rich or poor, should have the same choice. They should be able to get a first rate education, one that fosters growth and learning, not hopelessness and despair.

For all the President's talk of equality and opportunity for all, he is now the obstacle to those parents who want only the same privileges he has, to give their kids the best education possible.

He seems to be more interested in bureaucrats, unions and Federal control than in the well-being of our children. Our President does not believe that you parents are smart enough to do what is best by your kids, by denying you the freedom of choice that he and the First Lady exercise, he is denying your children their best shot at the American dream.

What is wrong with letting parents make their own decision, use their own money, that their children would be better served in a private school or a public school on the other side of town? What is wrong with this? What is the President trying to save? Clearly it is not our children's future.

Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple; it is school choice. The answer is simple; it is parental control. The answer is freedom to choose how and where your child gets an education. The President must not prevent our children from succeeding. The future of America depends on it.

EDUCATION, A TOP PRIORITY WITH DEMOCRATS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, Democrats have made education a top priority this Congress and our emphasis has been on improving public schools, including raising educational standards and addressing infrastructure needs. I listened to the previous speaker, and my concern is that the Republican leadership, after trying to make the deepest education cuts in history last year, is now emphasizing vouchers to pay for private schools as the way to reform our education system.

I listened to the previous speaker, and he talked about how the President and Mrs. Clinton send their kids to private school. But what he neglected to say is that they are paying for that out of their own pocket. The problem with the voucher system that the Republican leadership is talking about is that this is public dollars, tax dollars, that they want to take that to be used to improve the public schools and take those tax dollars and give it to private schools.

Now, I have no problem with choice. The President and Mrs. Clinton exercised the choice, and they pay privately out of their own pocket to send their kids to private school, and I think choice is great. Everyone, if they can afford it, if they have the money, they have the ability throughout this great land of ours to send their kids to private school or parochial school. But the difference is the use of public dollars, public money that could be used to improve the infrastructure of the schools, to pay for more teachers, to provide smaller classrooms, to teach and to improve basic skills. Those public dollars should not be taken away from the public schools and given to private schools to pay for private education for a very few.

In my opinion, vouchers will not help public schools; just the opposite, they will drain away resources that could be used to improve public school standards and rebuild crumbling or overcrowded schools.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership's latest experiment with vouchers will be rolled out this week right here in the District of Columbia. Their plan will be considered as part of the D.C. appropriations bill I think this Thursday. It will provide up to \$3,200 to 2,000 children in Washington to attend private schools.

This is about \$45 million in Federal funds that would be made available to pay for private education for about 3 percent of the District of Columbia students, 3 percent of the students.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion it makes no sense to take away \$45 million that could be made available to the city of Washington to improve basic schools or to fix deteriorated buildings in the public schools and use this money for private schools.

Now, we know because of the decrepit physical condition of many schools in the District of Columbia, the opening of the school year was postponed for 3 weeks. The voucher programs will take away money that could be used to fix these schools that were in fact closed. Why, so that 3 percent of the students can take advantage of the situation, and the other 97 percent who remain in the public schools will suffer?

With 9 out of 10 children in America attending public schools, Democrats understand that we need to rebuild and reform public schools, not to destroy them.

Today our House Democratic Task Force on Education is going to unveil a new Democratic agenda to improve public schools, and I am not going to get into all aspects of it, but I just wanted to mention some of the key elements again to the public schools.

First of all, the emphasis will be on academic excellence in the basics. Every student has to learn the basics, reading, writing, arithmetic. That is what it is all about if they are going to succeed later in life.

Second, we are talking about better training teachers to help children achieve high standards. We need to bet-

ter train our teachers if they are going to better train our students.

Third, we are talking about a major infrastructure program to basically improve the situation with the decrepit buildings in many of our communities around the country. We have overcrowding, we need new schools, we have schools in disrepair that need to be fixed up, we have schools that need to be improved so they can accommodate the new high technology age that can be wired for computers, so they can have students so they can be involved in the Internet, for example.

The other thing that we keep talking about is the fact that a small amount of money can be used on the Federal level to support local initiatives for strong neighborhood public schools. Democrats believe in the neighborhood school concept. We think the Federal dollars can help in that regard. Also we need to empower parents. We need to get parents more involved in the public schools so they can choose the best public schools for their children.

Again, choice is fine, choice within the public schools. Choice is also fine if people want to pay to send their kids to public schools. But let us use the public dollars to improve the public schools.

I want to say I believe very strongly, Mr. Speaker, that Americans overwhelmingly support the Democratic commitment to public schools, and they want to make our public schools safer, improve the quality of teachers, and get parents more involved in education. That is what the Democrats wanted. Fix the public schools, improve the public schools.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 10 a.m.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 50 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until 10 a.m.

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AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

The Reverend Jay Scribner, First Baptist Church, Branson, MO, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray, please.

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the privilege of living in America. We are thankful for the many freedoms which we enjoy. Freedoms which were framed by our forefathers and perpetuated by our representative form of government in this great Republic.

I pray for these men and women who by virtue of their election, have assumed a very honorable position as a servant representative to the people of these United States. May the decisions

which they make today be made with wisdom from on high, with integrity from within, with justice and fairness for all people, and may it be obvious that even though they sit on both sides of the aisle, today they are one in purpose and intention to make right and wise decisions. May they be decisions that will reestablish righteousness as the foundation of morality for America, a pride in our heritage, love for our neighbor, and honor for our God and Saviour.

May the biblical Gospel be central to their public activism. May godliness be central to their personal attributes. And may God be central to their political action. All because righteousness exalts a nation.

We pray this in the name of Christ the Lord. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. McNULTY. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER. The question is on the Chair's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. McNULTY. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from New York [Mr. McNULTY] come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. McNULTY led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOME TO THE REVEREND JAY SCRIBNER

(Mr. BLUNT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. Speaker, it is a great honor to follow our guest chaplain Rev. Jay Scribner today. Reverend Scribner has been pastor of the First Baptist Church in Branson for the past 20 years. Branson has grown tremendously in the 20 years that Jay has been there. This town of 3,500 will host